

Conversations About an Empty Suit
By
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Cast of Characters

Abby	50s. Artistic director of a storefront theatre company. White
Suzannah	Mid 20s. Lighting designer. Not glamorous. Any race
Gregory	40s-60s. Actor and company member. African American
Peter Kennedy	50s. Highly successful director and screenwriter. Polished. White

Place

A small, professional theatre

Time

The present

ACT ONE
SCENE ONE

Sounds of the front door to the theatre being unlocked. Work lights are flipped on. ABBY comes onstage, carrying an armful of men's suits with hangers askew in the jackets, some mail including an American Theatre magazine, a script, papers, a travel mug, her purse, and the keys. She dumps the suits on the desk, drops everything else on the chair. She exits backstage and a general stage wash of lights comes up on the stage. She then crosses to the work lights, turns them off, returns, and looks at the stage.

Front door is heard being opened.

ABBY

Suz?

SUZANNAH enters with a to-go cup of coffee and a bag of donuts.

SUZANNAH

Yup.

Suzannah moves the papers from the chair to the desk, plops down at the desk.

ABBY

I need that special for the monologue.

SUZANNAH

I need another dimmer pack.

ABBY

We don't have the money for another dimmer pack.

SUZANNAH

Then you don't get your special.

Suzannah begins flipping through the American Theatre magazine.

ABBY

Suz, please, I need the special.

SUZANNAH

Then get me another dimmer pack. Or move the desk.

ABBY

How can I move the desk? We can't move the desk.

SUZANNAH

Abby, I've seen you move mountains. Move the fucking desk.

Suzannah grunts at something in the magazine.

ABBY

We need this playing area isolated and separate so we can look into the past without jumbling it into the present.

SUZANNAH

Then get me-

ABBY

-don't have the money. Can you ask-

SUZANNAH

-Did. They're doing *Angels in America*. They got nothing to spare. They asked me for extension cords, which gives you an idea.

ABBY

How about across the-

SUZANNAH

Asked.

ABBY

Freddy and-

SUZANNAH

Nope.

ABBY

Shit.

SUZANNAH

No shit. So, jumbled or find the money.

ABBY

Can you re-focus? Tweak? Work your Suzannah magic?

SUZANNAH

This is tweaked. This is magic. (*Gesturing to the suits*) For the second act?

ABBY

Yeah. I raided Bob's closet.

SUZANNAH

I liked what I saw of rehearsal last night. It's gonna be fierce.

ABBY

Yeah, it's coming together. How's the toilet in the ladies? Still?

SUZANNAH

Still.

ABBY

I went on Youtube. I think it might be a seal. I'm going to fiddle with it.

SUZANNAH

God, I hate this magazine.

ABBY

What? Oh. We all hate that magazine.

SUZANNAH

Where do they get this money? Look at that! Do you know how many gels and instruments it takes to make that effect?

ABBY

You do that with the seven coffee cans and three flashlights I give you.

SUZANNAH

Yes, I do. But I still need another dimmer pack or your special won't be special. Your special won't even exist. (*Refers to magazine*) And this. How can a director in Jersey be so excited about can't-pronounce-it-theatre in Budapest doing this show I've never heard of but obviously should of 'cuz this dude's so moved and thrilled they're doing it? Shit, I have trouble plowing through all the plays I'm designing for. Oh, man, now I'm depressed.

ABBY

You're always depressed.

SUZANNAH

No, I'm unappreciated. And I'm in tech. Which is actually the exact same thing.

ABBY

I appreciate you.

SUZANNAH

Is it just theatre? Do other businesses have people that seem to do more with their 24-daily allotment of hours? I'm way behind on everything, I mean I haven't even started *Watchmen!*

ABBY

(Abby has no idea what Watchmen is)

Oh no.

SUZANNAH

(Barreling on)

I can't even talk to my brother anymore because he has absolutely no spoiler-boundaries whatsoever. Am I a failure?

ABBY

Yes. I'm embarrassed to be seen in public with you.

Suzannah tosses the magazine aside and pulls out her smart phone.

SUZANNAH

I knew it. A failure at twenty-six. Well, bitch-cousin-Morgana-don't-call-me-Morgan will be happy. *(Reacting to something on her phone)* I hate when my mother posts on my Facebook page! Why does she do that? Do I look like I want to see inspirational videos with kittens?

Abby is staring at the upstage desk.

Hey, didn't this guy teach at your school?

ABBY

Maybe I'll call Paul at Fox and Hound. Maybe they could loan us one.

SUZANNAH

He died.

ABBY

WHAT!?! Paul died!?

SUZANNAH

No! The guy at your college.

ABBY

Who?

SUZANNAH

Fredrick Henderson. You went where he was the honcho, right?

Suzannah holds up her phone for Abby to see.

ABBY

Yes. What? He died?

SUZANNAH

Yup. His headshot looks old, he looks old in it, so he must have been really old.

Abby is now reading Suzannah's phone screen.

ABBY

I graduated, like thirty years ago so...

She gives Suzannah her phone back and pulls out her own.

SUZANNAH

So, what was he like? He won a Tony once, right?

ABBY

Yeah, before he came to head up the department.

SUZANNAH

What was he like to study with?

Abby talks while she reads her phone.

ABBY

I don't know. You had to apply for a spot to study with him. And he favored certain students and I wasn't one he...favored. So, I don't know. In the Open Session he could be.... he could be...adversarial. He called it "respect". Some students were good with that. I never was. Man, look at all these posts already.

SUZANNAH

Was Peter Kennedy one?

ABBY

What? Yes. Peter Kennedy was a favorite.

SUZANNAH

So, is this like an emotional thing? Is hugging to be expected?

ABBY

(Putting her phone away)

God, no. This is completely not an emotional thing.

SUZANNAH

Color me relieved. I suck at the hugging you seem to favor. But I would hug you for a dimmer pack.

ABBY

You aren't getting a dimmer pack

SUZANNAH

Thusly, you are not getting your special. You want me to take these suits backstage?

ABBY

Yes. No. No, I'll do it.

Suzannah exits, coffee and donuts in hand. Abby drags the desk into the light with the suits still on top of the desk. Door opens again.

GREGORY

(Offstage, calling)

Abby?

ABBY

Here, Gregory.

Gregory enters, carrying two suits. One is a glen plaid.

GREGORY

Oh, good! You got some. I pried these loose from Danny's closet.

ABBY

Take 'em back. These should be enough.

GREGORY

I'm not taking them back. Took me two days to get these outta the pack rat's hands. And they looked dreadful on him when they DID fit him. I love the man, but he shall never be thin again. I picked up voicemail. *Theatre Beat* is coming.

ABBY

And I heard from Muriel. So that's two reviews. No Moby Dick, of course.

GREGORY

Of course. We're not Equity.

Abby grunts.

Have we heard from She Who Shall Not Be Named?

ABBY

When in god's name is Voldemort going to die? Or retire? Or get canned?

GREGORY

Never. People do too many musicals. She Who Shall Not Be Named loves the musicals. *(Pause)*
We could do a musical.

ABBY

Yes! Let's do *Annie, Love Boat: The Musical*, and wrap the season up by farting out *The Sound of Music* performed by disadvantaged toddlers.

GREGORY

I bet there's a grant for farting toddlers.

ABBY

God but people love helping "the youth."

GREGORY

Could they be farting disadvantaged toddlers of color? We so need a new computer for the booth.

ABBY

We need everything. Dimmer packs. Computer. Audiences. Grants. Critics that don't hate everything I do. Remind me why we're doing this again?

GREGORY

The money. The fame. The glamour. The world-wide recognition. All those Tony's. How's the toilet?

ABBY

Really. Why are we doing this?

GREGORY

Well, why I'm doing it? Professional satisfaction. Working with you and everyone. Being a company member with an actual key to the place. Playing roles that other theatres only give to white guys.

ABBY

Speaking of white guys, how was the anniversary dinner?

GREGORY

The lamb was sublime, and Camille gave us dessert on the house. You?

ABBY

I don't like lamb.

GREGORY

Abigail.

ABBY

How am I?

GREGORY

Yes. Why are you all grumpy? This usually hits during tech week.

ABBY

I'm never getting a Tony, you know.

GREGORY

Do you want a Tony?

ABBY

YES! Of course, I want a fucking Tony! Who doesn't want a Tony?

GREGORY

I think you may be working in the wrong city if you want one of those.

ABBY

Wrong city. Wrong state. Wrong gender. Wrong age. Wrong, wrong, wrong.

GREGORY

Well, you're white. You've got that going for you.

ABBY

True.

GREGORY

Many people think you're doing plenty of things right.

ABBY

All seven of our subscribers.

GREGORY

All two hundred and eleven.

ABBY

Two hundred and ten.

GREGORY

Oh. Yeah. Jamie.

A moment.

We won the big Heartland Arts thingy-

ABBY

- Six years ago. A MIDWESTERN theatre award. It's like winning best sushi bar in Yosemite.

GREGORY

Well, aren't we the New York snob today! You create vibrant, provocative theatre for actual real people, the...the...

ABBY

99%? The point zero nine percent of the ninety-nine percent who actually come. I'm a small business owner in a crappy location, in an overpriced rental space, a landlord broker than me, questionable plumbing in a freezing bathroom-

GREGORY

-but with a fabulous paint job.

ABBY

I should get you pom-poms.

GREGORY

I demand a fetching sweater as well.

ABBY

One of those skirts.

GREGORY

Goodness no. Have you seen my legs?

A moment.

Come on! What? What is it, Abs?

ABBY

Fredrick Henderson died.

GREGORY

I'm so sorry. Who is Fredrick Henderson?

ABBY

The head of the theatre department at my university. He won a Tony in the sixties, late fifties maybe, for directing. He died.

GREGORY

I'm so sorry. Is this why...why you're asking-

ABBY

-no. And no, I am not sad. I don't know what I am, but I am absolutely certain I am not sad. Is that bad?

GREGORY

What are you?

ABBY

I said, I don't know. I think I should be sad but...shit, I'm grand. Lovely. I'm just all (*breaks into song*) "What's it all about, Alfie?"

GREGORY

See! We should do a musical!

ABBY

You aggravate my post-menopausal ass.

Suzannah enters.

SUZANNAH

What's that from? Hey, Gregory.

GREGORY

Suz. Where's my donut?

SUZANNAH

You weren't here. Donut gone the way of all donuts in my possession longer than 10 minutes. The song. My mother sings that.

GREGORY

Alfie?

GREGORY AND ABBY

(Singing in unison)

"What's it all about, Alfie?"

SUZANNAH

Oh, god. Yeah.

ABBY

Song from that Michael Caine movie.

SUZANNAH

Who's Michael Caine?

GREGORY

Dear god in heaven! How can you not know who Michael Caine is?!

SUZANNAH

Do you know who Matt Smith is? Jackson Rathbone? Daniel Radcliffe?

GREGORY

I know that one! The last one. I know his name.

ABBY

Rose loves Daniel Radcliffe.

SUZANNAH

Okay, I was thinking, if we move some money from props, we can rent a dimmer pack from-

ABBY

-We don't have the money for another dimmer pack! I told you last week. I told you Monday. I told you yesterday. I told you three times today. What we have is what we have. It's not enough but it is what we have. OKAY? God! You guys!

GREGORY

Hey! What did I do?

ABBY

No, Gregory, not you but-

GREGORY

-Okay, Abby, just-

SUZANNAH

-Abby.

ABBY

-Suz. Just stop with asking me for-

GREGORY

-Abby, let me.

ABBY

No! I have this! SUZ-

GREGORY

-Abigail-

SUZANNAH

-Oh Abs, don't make it a thing. You make everything a thing.

ABBY

YOU! YOU! YOU'VE been making it a thing!!!

SUZANNAH

Because it's my job to make it a thing so I get the things I need to do my job.

GREGORY

Okay, everybody, let's calm down.

ABBY

Well, it's my job to give you a job, give you a budget, keep you on budget, and create a complete world out of nothing, on nothing, while everyone demands something, and it's still never fucking enough! Nothing I do is ever enough. So just do your job like I hired you to do with what I said we had to do it with, OKAY?!

*Abby storms off stage. Suzannah strolls off in the other direction.
Gregory proceeds to calmly begin folding the suits.*

END SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

Abby sits in the audience, staring at the stage. The stage lights are up as before. She gets up, picks up a few tiny bits of paper or small nails off the stage floor, puts them in her pocket, and returns to her seat. After another moment she gets up, and pacing the stage slowly, begins reading her smart phone. She finally settles in a chair far upstage in a darker area and continues to read. Suzannah comes on stage with either a ladder or scaffolding.

SUZANNAH

Hey. Didn't know you were still here.

ABBY

Still here.

SUZANNAH

Price of power, eh?

ABBY

I guess. Hey, I'm sorry about-

SUZANNAH

(Waving the apology away)

-please. You're a powder puff compared to Johnny-Dickface-Cowboys-Fan-Shithead Simmons.

ABBY

Hah! How's *God of Carnage* going at Johnny Simmons' Theatre of Money?

SUZANNAH

Living up to its billing.

ABBY

Lots of money?

SUZANNAH

Lots of carnage.

Climbing the ladder, she refocuses a lighting instrument, casting a warm light on Abby.

ABBY

Whoa! Hello!

SUZANNAH

Don't get too excited. I took this from downstage right.

ABBY

Oh.

SUZANNAH

You seem troubled, Obi Wan. I sense a rift in the universe. Like millions of voices screamed and then suddenly went silent.

ABBY

Oh, nobody's going silent.

SUZANNAH

Can you stand up?

Abby does and the light flickers on and off her head and shoulders.

ABBY

Were you ever inspired by a teacher?

SUZANNAH

Step up six inches.

Abby steps upstage and is now out of the light.

Damn. Come back. Yeah. Sure. My college lighting instructor. And my dad. I guess he qualifies. And there was the shop teacher in middle school.

ABBY

How?

SUZANNAH

How did they inspire me? I dunno. Made me feel good at doing what I was good at. Weren't boring. Were into what I was into. I didn't have to be girly-spangled-bedazzled to be special.

ABBY

They made you feel special?

SUZANNAH

A little too Hallmark Lifetime Channel Presents for me. What's up?

ABBY

This. THIS! All this.

She holds up her phone.

Stacks of posts about Fredrick. His inspiration. How great he was. How he gave everyone all this...inspiration. The dude just scared the shit out of me. He...he...he was just really distant. Like only a few measured up and I certainly wasn't one of them. But all these messages. Everybody must have been blessed by his wisdom and insights except me. I feel like I missed the meeting.

SUZANNAH

What meeting?

ABBY

The success meeting.

SUZANNAH

Read me one. But do it sitting at the desk.

Abby sits.

ABBY

Okay, this is by Hank Tobias. He did one scene in Open Session sophomore year.

SUZANNAH

Lean back a bit. Open Session?

ABBY

Open Session was when anyone could come in and present a prepared, rehearsed scene for the entire theatre department. Once a week. A big thing. Hank and this other guy did a scene from...a movie. Um...*Officer and a Gentleman*. Okay. Whatever. It wasn't Strindberg but they were sophomores putting themselves out there. And Fredrick ripped Hank a new one. He called him lazy. Guilty of complacent acting. Lacking in the courage to take an artistic risk, the whole shebang. Hank cried for a week. He came back from break 15 pounds heavier. Never did Open Session again. Alright? This is what Hank wrote. "*I wept when I heard this dreadful news. Fredrick inspired me to be a better artist and a better human being. His high standards I carry with me to this day.*" Along with that fifteen extra I'm sure. "*My experiences*"-notice the plural-experiences. "*My experiences in Open Session guided my artistic and theatrical growth like no other teacher ever did again. I treasure my time in Fredrick's presence to this day.*"

SUZANNAH

What's this Hank doing now?

ABBY

Let me see.

She taps at her phone for a moment.

Looks like...computer analyst in San Francisco. Some theatre but mostly community. Added another twenty to the Fredrick fifteen but still amazingly attractive. Wait! Wait! Okay. Listen to this one. This is from Kathy Lipkiss. Musical Theatre major. Big voice, tall blonde, but Fredrick only really liked tiny, earthy brunettes. She wrote, "*Fredrick made me dig deep, deeper than I ever had as an artist.*" Once she did Open Session, did a Billie Holliday song. Fredrick said something like, "Is this really what Open Session is for? Rehashing material which is totally out of your wheelhouse? As an artist you need to understand your type, your strengths, your weaknesses and what you should not even attempt until you have at least a modicum of life experience under your belt."

SUZANNAH

Did you ever do an Open Season?

ABBY

Open Session.

SUZANNAH

Shit, same difference. Did you?

ABBY

Junior year. I did a scene from *Crimes of the Heart*. Very popular play back in my day.

SUZANNAH

I've heard of Crimes of the Fucking Heart. So? What did the guy say?

ABBY

Nothing.

SUZANNAH

Meaning actually nothing? Or you were nothing? What?

ABBY

I did the scene with Cindy Taylor. One of his favorites. He praised her up and down. How in the moment and present she was. How, even though he knew the play, he didn't know what she was going to do next and he was enraptured. And that was it.

SUZANNAH

Nothing about you. Your work.

ABBY

Nope.

SUZANNAH

Where's this gal now?

ABBY

Cindy? L.A. for ages. She was on *Two Broke Girls* as a customer. And she does some stand-up.

SUZANNAH

So that teacher's pet really set the world on fire, eh?

ABBY

Peter Kennedy did.

SUZANNAH

How well did you know him? Peter?

ABBY

We were friends. College friends. You know, we would sit in the bar, late into the night, talking intensely about art, life, you know.

SUZANNAH

So? What was he like?

ABBY

He was...he was like most everybody else. East coaster. Nice enough. Okay actor. He was still an actor then. He was bold, I remember that. Spoke up alot. Convinced he was right. Lots of confidence. And now he owns Hollywood.

SUZANNAH

By the way, Foster Klein was mine.

ABBY

Who?

SUZANNAH

Foster Klein is my Peter Kennedy. But he was a prick. Would come to all the parties, leer at girls' chests', leave when the beer was gone. Called me too fat to fuck, dropped out junior year, went to London and is now a super successful production designer. Tim Burton, Ridley Scott, he works with all of them. Like I said, a prick.

ABBY

Talented?

SUZANNAH

(Pauses)

Determined. Disdainful of anything that wasn't what he considered true art. Like...there was no wiggle room. If something was on TV, it automatically sucked. If it wasn't a very, very specific, identifiable genre, it was worthless.

ABBY

Why are they there and we're here?

SUZANNAH

Pricks get ahead? Was Kennedy-

ABBY

-a prick? I heard stories later, of what he became. Can't say for sure. How can anyone be objective about the past? But why?! Why was he considered one of the "ones"? Why not me? Did Fredrick see something in him I didn't have?

SUZANNAH

He did go to New York.

ABBY

And I didn't.

SUZANNAH

And I didn't drop out and go to London.

ABBY

Why didn't I have the confidence? Did I know I didn't have the talent or was it just the fear that I didn't have the talent? Not by the lack but by the fear of the lack?

SUZANNAH

I can say for a fact, you have the talent. I didn't know you then but what you get out of actors now. Designers too. There's a reason I work for you for nothing but beer money. Johnny Simmons has to pay through the nose to get me. When you did that scene, if Fredrick had praised you instead of Cindy, would it have changed things?

ABBY

I don't know. I think...I think I cared too much and it showed.

SUZANNAH

Needy is very unattractive. Which completely sucks. But you have to admit, it was a bitch of a choice he set up for you all.

ABBY

How?

SUZANNAH

Do you want to be ripped to shreds by the guru, or just ignored, on the slim chance you might enter the favorites fold? The dude sounds like a dick.

Suzannah makes an adjustment and Abby is suddenly blasted with a strong flood of light.

ABBY

Really?

SUZANNAH

Really.

ABBY

Really?

SUZANNAH

If half of what you're telling me is true, yup. Big, fat, famous Tony-winning dickwad.

ABBY

But don't you have to push people? That was the party line.

SUZANNAH

Explain downstage.

Abby moves downstage

ABBY

That if you didn't call people out on sub-standard work, you weren't respecting their ability to do better. That it was insulting to-

SUZANNAH

-not be verbally and emotionally abusive?

ABBY

To be satisfied.

SUZANNAH

And Fredrick was the one who decided what was satisfactory. He decided what was art, what was crap, and there was no middle ground.

ABBY

Yes. But he was preparing us for the real world of rejection.

SUZANNAH

Really?

ABBY

What?

SUZANNAH

It wasn't the real world, Abs! You were paying the dude to train you, not be a substitute producer training you in how to be rejected and dismissed. Oh boy. Let's dump a hundred grand into this guy's pocket so he can not cast me. Wow. Sign me up. All these places do it. Sign one marquee name to pull people in. Oh, look, our staff has won this many Nobel, Pulitzer, Tony, Forbes-business whatever awards. Give us your whatever, time, talent, work for shit-pay, tuition, whatever, and maybe, just maybe, you'll get to ride the elevator with the schmuck.

ABBY

But connection to that person can play out. Connections, who you know, it's so important.

SUZANNAH

Then they should sell THAT. Truth in marketing. Work for shit-pay and you get fifteen minutes a month with...I dunno, Warren Buffet. Or Fredrick. Or whoever. What did you get for your hundred grand and four years spent at Henderson's feet? Looks like a severe case of Man-I-Suck.

ABBY

So, what's your argument?

SUZANNAH

Oh! Aren't we going all debate team! Sure. I'll play. Okay, I'd say for a teacher, someone who was entrusted with nurturing young artists to explore, grow and learn about themselves and their craft, and actually being paid by ALL those artists for that service but only giving that service to a few...yes, that Fredrick Henderson was guilty of not only not providing you with the service implied when you went to your pretty prestigious institution of higher learning but he was also pretty much the definition of being a big, pompous dickwad.

ABBY

How did you get so smart?

SUZANNAH

Me? I'm not smart.

ABBY

Yes, you are. When I was twenty-five-

SUZANNAH

-six.

ABBY

-Twenty-six, I didn't have your...your...

SUZANNAH

Cursing ability? Encyclopedic knowledge of all things science fiction? Gift of making gobos out of tin cans and gaff tape?

ABBY

Your fabulous disregard for-

SUZANNAH

-The Man.

ABBY

Exactly! I have no perspective. It took you five minutes to figure out what it took me thirty years to see.

SUZANNAH

Does it bother you?

ABBY

Yes. It really, really bothers me. Not you figuring it out.

SUZANNAH

But you not.

Abby nods.

That's why I like lighting. Easier to see the big picture from up here.

Suzannah shuts the instrument she is working on so it goes dark.

END SCENE TWO

SCENE THREE

Abby rolls the mop bucket and mop on stage while she talks on her cell phone. Her voice is raised, and she is speaking very clearly.

ABBY

It has no swearing but does have adult themes and some violence...there is one beheading but it happens off stage....obviously.....The Royal Thread...no, that's the title, The Royal Thread...yes, you can buy tickets at the door but we don't hold tickets at the door....it is better to purchase before...yes. Yes. Okay, we'll see you then! Thank you!

Abby balances her phone between her ear and shoulder and begins to slowly mop the stage while she speaks.

Yes, I'm sure.... yes, it is secure. We have never had a problem...There is a link through the...the brown button on the right side of the website, the one that says "To purchase tickets, click here" ...Okay. That's terrific...We'll see you then.... okay...okay...Thank you! Okay...Yes, I'm sure...okay, thank you! Bye-bye. Okay...Bye-bye. You too! Thank you so much...You have a great day! Thank you.

Fumbling to hang up the phone, she drops it in the bucket of dirty water.

OH MY FUCKING GOD IN HEAVEN!

She scoops it out. She begins jumping around the stage, chanting while she shakes the phone out.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck him. Fuck him!

Gregory enters.

GREGORY

I love the new warm up.

ABBY

My phone. I dropped my fucking phone in the fucking water and now it's dead and I am so, so, so.... oh, shit. I'm in one dark place, Gregory.

GREGORY

I've noticed.

ABBY

Sorry about rehearsal last night.

GREGORY

Oh, it was fine. Jeri needed a fire lit under her ass anyway.

ABBY

That isn't my directing style.

GREGORY

It was fine. People trust you.

ABBY

I felt like a dick.

GREGORY

And you successfully passed that feeling along. Along with quite a bit of colorful swearing, might I add. Sorry! Don't look at me like that! We'll survive.

ABBY

Oh god.

GREGORY

Abby, I've been thinking-

ABBY

Uh oh. What!? I'm sorry. I'll apologize in an e-mail to the cast-

GREGORY

Don't you dare. Abby, okay.

He hesitates.

Just go with me on this.

ABBY

Oh god. Okay.

GREGORY

Do you remember when you finally felt safe to strut? Really safe?

ABBY

What the hell are you talking about?

GREGORY

Getting this place going took some strut. Moxie. Fire. Tenacity. And you have it in spades. But you didn't do this when you were twenty.

ABBY

I was still trying to act.

GREGORY

Phhft. The starter career. Like the starter house.

ABBY

Strut? Well, after I gave up acting for sure. I think...probably around...I think after Bob and Rose were in that car accident.

GREGORY

And you had cancer.

ABBY

Yeah. That wakes a gal up. I suppose I figured...hell, I loved theatre. I started to realize I had a good eye and, well, my favorite part of the process was the process. Rehearsal, the nitty-gritty of making the story come alive. I didn't need to be on stage.

GREGORY

Your ego didn't-

ABBY

-Yeah! It didn't need that stroke; it needed the creative payoff of orchestrating the experience. I wanted that work. And so I decided to make it happen. Not wait for it.

GREGORY

The whole "clock is ticking" thing?

ABBY

Exactly. Lost a tit and some lymph nodes but geez, I got a whole lotta clarity in return. I just stopped giving a shit about what other people thought.

GREGORY

Goodness, what a delicious discovery. That kind of clarity.

ABBY

But why did it take so long? Why!? You're a man. Is it a guy thing? Guys seem to get it so much sooner!

GREGORY

Oh Abby, I'm a gay black man raised Baptist in southern Indiana. Strutting with safety took, maybe...thirty years? Still I'm valued as a whole human being, complex and worthy, by a very narrow population.

ABBY

I love you.

GREGORY

As you should. I'm marvelous. But what I'm saying is...Abs, you're not the only one who goes through this-

ABBY

-What is "this"? Do you know? 'Cuz it feels icky.

GREGORY

If you stop interrupting me, maybe I'll share my wisdom.

ABBY

Sorry.

GREGORY

Thank you. Okay. Danny's brother Simon, his big-shot newscaster brother, evening anchor in Kansas? Family star?

ABBY

Yes. Met him. Very nice hair. Lovely voice.

GREGORY

Oh, smooth as silk. Anyway, going out to dinner with Simon is like being in Beyonce's entourage...in Wichita. Get a couple of shots of Kentucky bourbon in him and you'll get Simon's Richard Engel story. They went to Stanford at the exact same time. But now Richard Engel is NBC News international Arabic-speaking, hot-shot, sniper-dodging superstar and Simon is fluent in teleprompter. It burns him up six ways from Sunday.

ABBY

So, I'm Wichita-level success? This is helping how?

GREGORY

Oh, don't be such a snob. I just mean, everybody has a Peter Kennedy in their life.

ABBY

What burns me up is that yesterday morning, if anyone asked, I was a big success. Geez, Abby is fabulous! Artistic director of a cool theatre company in a theatre-loving city, mom to an amazing kid, happily married, flexible day job with cool people. Stacks of great reviews all over our lobby walls, critical and audience hits. A few big hits.

GREGORY

And today?

ABBY

Today? I'm a medium success. A Coulda-Been-Big-If-I-Was-More...something. I basically live off my husband, my daughter is going away to college and incurring college debt because we...I don't make enough; I work a crappy day job with no pension in a room with florescent lighting. My business barely makes ends meet. I've gotten some flat-out brutal reviews, all of which I still have in a file by the way. Voldemort hates me because I have the audacity to not do musicals or do whatever I do completely wrong. I've seen people walk out of my shows. And I'm old. Did I blow my chance?

GREGORY

What chance?

ABBY

To be the BIG success? I think I've missed it. I've played it too safe. I have a half-assed life, create half-assed art, in a half-assed way. Everyone says, "Take the risk. Follow your dreams." What if I've turned out to be...NOT The One?

GREGORY

The one?

ABBY

Risk has win or lose built into the definition. What if you take the risk and lose? What if I'm the loser? I mean the...the...the fucking Subway sandwich maker down the street makes more than I do!

GREGORY

What was the dream you didn't get?

ABBY

I'm not sure. Maybe it's not just theatre. Maybe it's everything. Danny's brother wanted to be, um, Walter Cronkite or something, right?

GREGORY

Dan Rather, I think. And he loves *60 Minutes*, so a little Mike Wallace was in there too probably. Abs, not everybody can be-

ABBY

-A star. I know. In my head, I know. But all this work, all this time, all this "me," and is this all I could manage to do?

GREGORY

But, Abs. I shouldn't have to say this. You know you are respected and loved. Everybody knows you, knows us-

ABBY

-Oh, I'm super famous...in *storefront* theatre. Wow. Is that the New York Times calling on my cell phone?

GREGORY

You have built this from nothing. Without you-

ABBY

-But Gregory, I...I...I have never been on the cover of anything! No one will ever interview me, asking for my wisdom. I think I have some but maybe I don't? I mean, I will NEVER be interviewed by Terry Gross!

GREGORY

Because, god knows, that certainly is the definition of success, eh?

ABBY

A Terry Gross interview? Kinda sorta is, Greg.

GREGORY

Alright, I'll give you that. Okay, Abigail, let's give this all a little context, shall we?

ABBY

PLEASE!

GREGORY

We'll take Peter Kennedy as the success-winner example. I love Peter Kennedy's work. I do. Danny and I have all his stuff on DVD. Well, not that last series but...he's a gifted storyteller, no doubt. He is also rich, white, raised by a rich, white family, in a world basically still run by rich white families, and thus a culture which values stories about rich white people above all else.

ABBY

I love it when you go all Malcolm X.

GREGORY

He grew up connected, raised from birth with an understanding of how to talk to power. How power likes to be talked about. If he stumbled here and there, where was he going to fall? Upper East Side?

ABBY

Connecticut, I think.

GREGORY

Where would you have fallen?

ABBY

Cedar Rapids.

GREGORY

Richard Engel, Simon's arch nemesis, you know his background? Grew up on, drum roll please, yes, the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Elite prep-school. Dad? Worked at Goldman Sachs. Mom? Antiques dealer in Manhattan. Does this make him any less of a brilliant reporter and journalist? Absolutely not. But you? Simon and Danny? Danny grew up so far from the seats of power, it made Cedar Rapids look like D.C.

ABBY

I gotta ask.

GREGORY

Rhineland, Wisconsin. They went to Duluth when they wanted to get wild. You all had to be twice as talented and three times more ambitious to get half as far.

ABBY

I don't know, Greg. Cream always rises to the top.

GREGORY

Really? You really believe that?

ABBY

Yes. I think. Maybe?

GREGORY

Kennedy's first big hit. What was it?

ABBY

Um...god, let's see. That play about the scandal.

GREGORY

The lacrosse team.

ABBY

Which was a metaphor for-

GREGORY

-Abs, it was about a goddamn lacrosse team!

ABBY

I see your point.

GREGORY

Richard Engel, Peter Kennedy? Both dripping with talent. No question. But both also had a really big head start. Incredibly big. Not just with money. They grew up with the power brokers as neighbors. They...crapped gold coins, for god's sake.

ABBY

If we could leverage that, I think we've solved our cash flow problem.

GREGORY

What I'm saying is the Peter Kennedys of the world knew they could strut with safety. From day one, he internalized being embraced. His viewpoint being of more value. What he saw and lived was the gold standard. Sure, I'm sure the guy worked his ass off. Not every upper class entitled white guy makes it. But knowing the.... tailor of the success suit already has your measurements in the rolodex kind of helps with the risk taking, don't ya think?

ABBY

I think I wasn't brave enough.

GREGORY

Was bravery encouraged? This teacher. Fredrick Henderson? (*Abby nods*) Did he encourage you to take a chance? Dive in? When his students risked, excuse me, when his unconnected students with the stink of the Midwest all over them mind you, risked, was it rewarded? Recognized even?

Abby shrugs.

Abby, the fix was in long before you got to college.

ABBY

Really? You really believe that? That there is no way to win, to get ahead? That we are locked into our...class? Our social strata?

GREGORY

Oh no! I didn't say that. I'm saying we are all products of a long history and to blame oneself for hundreds, thousands of years of baggage, to put it all on our shoulders when we choose to sit back one day and define ourselves...well, it might be helpful to look at the bigger picture. So. Anyway. I have a little gift for you. Danny was looking for tickets to a lecture about baseball, thank god he couldn't get any, but he came across this...well.... you see, serendipity is in your favor. The goddess is rooting for you. The karmic wheel is spinning in your direction.

ABBY

What the hell are you talking about?

GREGORY

I purchased you a ticket. For this coming Wednesday.

ABBY

Okay? You do know we are staring down tech week soon. Rehearsals every-

GREGORY

-Oh, this takes precedence. I've already arranged for an old-fashioned line-through anyway.

ABBY

You changed my rehearsal schedule?

GREGORY

Yes, I did.

ABBY

I don't know how I feel about that.

GREGORY

I don't really care. Do you want your present?

ABBY

I'm a little scared but okay.

GREGORY

It's a ticket to an...um...inspirational talk at the Palmer House. Sort of like a TED Talk.

ABBY

Why?

GREGORY

Look at who the speaker is.

Gregory hands her a ticket.

END SCENE THREE

SCENE FOUR

Peter Kennedy stands holding a handful of dirt in hand and a balloon in the other. He is casually dressed. Abby is sitting in the audience.

PETER

So that's what I encourage all of you to do. Tell the truth no matter what the cost. And keep that dirt out of your balloon.

Laughter and applause. The lights fade and shift. Peter pulls off his mike and, checking his phone, begins to leave.

ABBY

Peter?

PETER

Thank you so much for coming.

He grabs her hand, shakes it, and continues to exit and then stops.

Abby?

ABBY
(Laughing)

Yeah.

PETER

Abby. Oh! Wow.

They hug.

God, it's great see you again. Wow, you haven't changed a bit.

ABBY

You either.

PETER

Ha! A little grayer. I hope all is well with you? So good to see you again. You look marvelous.

ABBY

You too. It was a great talk.

PETER

Thank you. It's...well, being profound for 20 minutes is a study in LA-Meets-New York-Meets-YouTube indulgence but I see the need. Shit, Abby, actually, I have an appointment. Running late is my default mode, I swear. But how are you doing? Are you still-

ABBY

-No. Not acting.

PETER

It's tough. Yes, but, so crazy. Are you married? Kids?

PETER

I'm artistic director of my own theatre. I'm a director. A director too. And married. A teenager. Not married to a teenager! I mean-

PETER

-Yeah. That's terrific, Abs.

ABBY

-I have a teenager.

PETER

And your own theatre company. Brava.

ABBY

I also read your piece in the Times on Fredrick. It was...beautifully written, of course. I just have a quick question.

PETER

Thank you. Such a loss. God, I hate this but I have to run.

ABBY

Wasn't Fredrick actually a mean, bitter, sour son-of-a-bitch?

PETER

What?

ABBY

Fredrick. In your essay, your article in the Times. I read it about five times. And all the Facebook posts. Because it was driving me crazy. It still is. Did you really experience that? Did he really-

She reads from a piece of paper.

ABBY (CONT'D)

"Drive you to embrace your personal excellence by demanding only that"? Because I just remember a very few people getting praised and a whole bunch of others getting shamed.

Peter slides his phone into his pocket and stares at Abby. After a moment, Abby continues.

Fredrick Henderson ignored me. I paid the exact same amount you paid. Dollar for dollar, the university got the same dime out of each of us, but you got more for your money.

PETER

Maybe I made more of what was offered for the money? Perhaps it wasn't Fredrick. Perhaps it wasn't the university, the system. Perhaps it was you.

ABBY

Yes. Yes, I agree. I struggle with that. But I wasn't alone. I do clearly remember that. For every student he favored, there were dozens ignored. Dismissed. Waved away for not meeting the imaginary mark of "worthy of Henderson's attention, time and wisdom."

PETER

I think the accolades recently received just might prove you wrong.

ABBY

Yes. You would think.

PETER

Yes.

ABBY

When you heard he died, what was the first thing you felt? You know what I felt? I felt twenty again. But in a bad way. All my work, my accomplishments, my power suddenly fell away and I was not-good-enough again. Peter, I think...I think...I think Fredrick was a bad teacher.

PETER

For you.

ABBY

Not just for me. But I'm the only one to say it.

PETER

Then why say it? He's dead. Who cares?

ABBY

Peter, I gotta ask? When you wrote that essay, were you putting air or dirt in your balloon?

Abby exits, leaving Peter standing there.

END SCENE FOUR

SCENE FIVE

Gregory is sitting at the desk. Abby is in the first row of the audience.

GREGORY
(Standing)

If one could look ahead-

ABBY

You can't stand.

GREGORY

But it feels-

ABBY

-You aren't lit if you stand.

GREGORY

Oh, yes. Got it. *(Pause)* Could I sort of hunch?

ABBY

Really?

GREGORY

Alright.

He sits. Suzannah wanders in. Both Abby and Gregory ignore her. Long pause.

FUCK! I forgot the entire monologue. It just left my head. It's gone. God, I'm a terrible actor.

ABBY
(Rising)

Ok. We're done here

GREGORY

No. No, I can-

ABBY

-Stop. We'll work it tomorrow

GREGORY

Why do I act again?

ABBY

The money. The fame.

SUZANNAH

You done?

ABBY

God, yes.

SUZANNAH

Good. 'Cuz there's a guy here who wants to see you.

ABBY

What? Who?

Suzannah waves someone in. Peter Kennedy enters.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO
SCENE ONE

Everyone is in the same positions they had at the end of Act One.

ABBY

Peter.

PETER

Abby.

ABBY

Wow. Okay. Hi. Gregory, this is Peter. Peter Kennedy. Gregory.

They shake hands.

And you met Suzannah.

SUZANNAH

Yup. He met me.

ABBY

Have you been here long? Suz, did you let him-

PETER

I got here about fifteen minutes ago. Suzannah was unwilling to interrupt rehearsal.

Suzannah flashes an extra-wide smile.

Which is as it should be.

SUZANNAH

Yup.

GREGORY

Come on, Suz. Let's find a drink elsewhere.

SUZANNAH

I think-

ABBY

See you guys later.

GREGORY

(To Peter)

Nice meeting you. Come on, Suz.

SUZANNAH

Bye, Pete. *(To Abby)* We'll be at 17 Green if you need us.

Gregory and Suzannah exit.

ABBY

I will admit to being very, really very surprised to see you here.

PETER

Nice space.

ABBY

Thank you.

PETER

How many you seat?

ABBY

Ninety. Ninety-five if we get creative.

PETER

How long have you been in business?

ABBY

Peter, if you're here, you googled me, you googled us, you know exactly how long we've been open, all our seasons, every show, every grant we ever got, and probably how much we have or don't have in the bank.

PETER

Yes. Except the part about the bank. So, you do mostly new plays.

Abby nods.

Bold.

Abby nods.

Nice.

Abby waits.

PETER (CONT'D)

You sat through my pseudo-TED Talk not because you wanted to hear what I had to say or wanted to see me again. Or even hit me up for money, or a job, or shove a script in my hand. And even though you said it was about Fredrick, I don't think it was. Was it?

ABBY

I wanted to see if you would say anything different than what I would have said.

PETER

Did I?

ABBY

The balloon bit was bullshit but I liked the middle.

PETER

People like props. And it makes for a good photo.

ABBY

You're pissed about what I said about Fredrick, aren't you? Is that why-

PETER

-I remember you in class.

ABBY

Okay.

PETER

Directing Styles and...Scene Work, I think? The one in that really hot room on the third floor.

ABBY

Script Analysis.

PETER

You had it. Insight. Flair. A feel for people and what was really going on in a scene. But...you didn't...

ABBY

But what? WHAT? What didn't I do?

PETER

That's why. That's why you came.

ABBY
Yes.

PETER
It's been ages since I've been in a theatre like this.

ABBY
Did you make your appointment yesterday?

PETER
I was flying back home.

ABBY
Oh. Miss your flight?

PETER
Actually, I have my own plane. Well, the company's.

ABBY
Your company's.

PETER
Yes.

ABBY
What's that like?

PETER
Bizarre at first. Then, awesome. Then, routine. Then, a necessity. Then bizarre that it's a necessity. So, Abby?

He waits.

ABBY
Peter, how did you become you?

PETER
Meaning "Peter Kennedy, Show Runner"?

ABBY
Yes. Why you and not somebody else?

PETER
Why not you?

ABBY

I know why not me.

PETER

Why not you?

ABBY

I have no idea. I was lying just then.

PETER

How honest do you really want me to be?

ABBY

Honest but not mean. Fine line, I know.

PETER

You're saying honest-but-not-Fredrick-style-honest, aren't you?

Abby nods.

Okay. Whew. Okay. First, you didn't go to New York or LA.

Abby nods.

That's the big one. But...okay...the construct that Hollywood and New York being filled with desperate wanna-bes is true. But what people don't say is that there are also a massive amount a crazy-talented people also not making it. Whatever making it is.

ABBY

Oh, Peter! Please. You know what making it is.

PETER

Okay. What's making it?

ABBY

Spoken like someone who has. Artistic freedom. Public respect. Work. And, okay...money! Money for what you do! And shallow, shallow but getting Emmys, Oscars, Tonys, whatever. Status. Being listened to. Good reviews. Power. Don't be a jerk. You know.

PETER

Yeah. I do. But...I'm sorry Abby but there are hundreds of you. Thousands of you. In LA. In New York. Everywhere. I'm sorry. There are. All freakishly talented. With so much to give. It

PETER (CONT'D)

just makes it easier for everybody to think that whoever doesn't end up with a series or movie deal or a Tony doesn't deserve it because they don't have "it." Abby, I don't know. All I can guess is you aren't me because you aren't me.

ABBY

I'm not sure if that's mean or New Age.

PETER

Abby, don't you see, I don't know!? I worked my ass off? I make a shitload of money, buckets of money, because I worked myself crazy and produce work that makes people mountains of money by selling the feeling I manage to create. And I did it when I was supposed to.

ABBY

Supposed to? You said in your essay that Fredrick taught you-

PETER

-“There are no rules but excellence”? Bullshit. There are rules. Tons of rules. Do it young. There is a window of opportunity. Being young and brazen is more valuable than being any age and nice. Money talks. People hire their friends. Connections do help. ALOT. Being from New York or LA is a huge advantage. Maybe the biggest. Once you're inside, you're in the famous club. Just don't get ugly. By that I mean physically ugly. Crack-smoking ugly. Being white helps...still...unless you're a rapper. The rules are there until something so delicious and profitable comes along, they get waived.

ABBY

Except the crack-smoking ugly. I can't see that ever getting waived.

PETER

You've obviously never sat next to Mickey Rourke at a dinner party. You know what my mom told me, again and again? Not my workaholic dad. My MOM. “It's not about you. It's not personal. And go big or go home.” It wasn't your talent but, Abby, it was you. You believed your ideas weren't as good, you took it personally, and you didn't see the big picture. You didn't go big. And if you really wanted it so bad, why did you do this? Come here? Not go to New York?

ABBY

I thought...I knew New York or LA would swallow me up. I had no idea how to do it, really. I thought it was a calculated plan, coming here, getting experience, but maybe I was just scared. I didn't think I would stay. I thought it was just a step. And then things happened. Good stuff happened and I thought, “I've got momentum!” So, one more year. And then nothing would happen for a while and I thought I wasn't good enough or wasn't ready. And then another year.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Then I got married. Had a kid. Started the theatre. I thought, here, I'd make this the big thing that will launch me to that feeling of success. And then every day is such a slog to even survive. (*A moment*) I think I wasn't brave enough. I think I was just scared.

PETER

Think I wasn't?!

ABBY

Yes! I think you weren't. Because you already knew in your bones that you were more. You had a safety net. You had powerful friends, connections, and that...that...rich thing that rich, connected people have!

PETER

You had the goods, Abby. You would whisper all this great stuff to me in class, remember? And then I would raise my hand and say it. And it was good.

ABBY

But I would say it and be dismissed. I thought it was me. Obviously, according to you, it was.

PETER

Why didn't you say it again? You weren't enough of a bitch, Abs. A bad ass. You have to be just a nice fucking bad ass. Sometimes you'll be wrong, sometimes you'll be right. So what?! Trust me, no one's keeping track.

ABBY

So, why are you here, Peter?

PETER

If people think you know the truth, they stop telling you the truth. It's been a long time since I was surprised by what somebody said to me.

ABBY

What I said about Fredrick?

PETER

There are very few people in my orbit who are really honest with me. Oh, people will say shitty things all the time, but informed, personal, I-know-you-Peter truth? Very hard to come by. Why do you think I collaborate with the same people again and again? Well, of course, because they're really good at what they do but also, they're my fucking truth tellers! They don't treat me like "Peter Kennedy, Show Runner" but just Pete who constantly writes past the end of a scene and who needs a really tough editor, which is Franco. And...and...oh god, Renee. My line producer. I wrote this one scene, I said it had to be in Venice and she...well... it doesn't matter,

PETER (CONT'D)

but Renee shot me this look like, "Really, Pete?" And she was right. Venice Beach did work. But anyway, Franco, Renee, they know me. They can do stuff I can't do. And they just do it, without that look. That "Peter? You can't do that? I'm shocked!" look. Not many people see me as me. (*A moment*) And Abby, I'm not exempt. Guess how many times I've sat at those awards shows and not heard my name called?

ABBY

Come on, Peter.

PETER

Come on what?

ABBY

Nothing....no! Not nothing. I just think...well...

PETER

Say it, Abs! Just fucking say it. Whatever it is. Now. Right now. Be a bad ass. You know you want to!

ABBY

Damn, you are tough.

PETER

Please. So are you.

ABBY

Okay. So here I go. I'm going to be a nice fucking bad ass now.

PETER

Okay.

ABBY

Well, you had so much laid out for you on a...a.... pedigreed, New York City platter. And you are, hell, YOU, and you still want even more?

PETER

So do you. You want more too. And it's okay, Abs! But don't you blame me for being ambitious. And using everything I had. 'Cuz you had a whole lot laid out for you too. American, smart, inoffensively non-ethnically pretty, middle class, middle income, which means income, right? So college educated, sane parents, I'm guessing. No DCFS or SNAP? Abs, you didn't scratch your way up from Appalachia or Ethiopia yourself.

ABBY

True. And thank you, Peter. I didn't realize I was privy to such massive advantage and influence. Damn. I forgot to thank my dad for my two-thousand-dollar trust fund and my mom for the graduation gift of her Ford Taurus. God! This all just really pisses me off. For a few random, unfair, just flat out stupid reasons, accidents of where they were born, or what they happened to be or not be, so many people are not getting even a crack at their dream, not even the tiniest of breaks. Doesn't it piss you off?

PETER

Yes. Yes, it pisses me off too. And it works in reverse too. The only difference between the hick ignorant racist working at the garage and the slick ignorant bigot at the members only bar is a trust fund and one smart, lucky ancestor. I have so many friends.

He pauses.

No. Not friends anymore. Some friends. Some...just people I grew up with, frustrated, stunted by advantage and no passion. I was back home for my dad's birthday last month and this guy I went to high school with-

ABBY

-was it private? A prep school.

PETER

You know it was, smart-ass. Anyway, he tried to give me a script to read. His family is worth two billion dollars. Billion. And he's giving me a script so maybe he can make it in Hollywood. But it's all the same. Every business is an animal. They need food. Ideas. Every business, every business is a voracious animal, trolling for more. So be the food. Don't talk about it. Don't question it. Just do it. You have to care enough to churn out a ton of work and have the ability to churn out a ton of work. I could churn out story. Some people can churn out other stuff. I mean there's a reason I've won five Emmys and not the Field's medal for mathematics. I figured out there was no perfect, just quality and quantity. And if you spit out enough quantity, eventually, if you pay attention and aren't too much of a shit, you'll begin to get some quality. If you have the talent to begin with. It is an incredible, relentless grind of creativity.

ABBY

Our first season or two, I lived and died by every show. Now-

PETER

It's not one thing, right?

ABBY

Yes! It's the act of it. So much work for just a few moments in rehearsal when a scene comes together. Or that one performance which just sings. But more and more, it's become less an

ABBY (CONT'D)

explosive, artistic epiphany and more just a conveyor belt. If there was a recipe for making it, what would it be?

PETER

Contacts and voracious ambition.

ABBY

That sounds pretty cynical even for a Hollywood hotshot.

PETER

It does. Sorry. People say, "I'll do anything to make it. I'll work harder than anyone." Like the process is fair. That hard work is rewarded in kind.

ABBY

Are there nobodies that make it?

PETER

Totally unconnected? From flyover, middle-of-nowhere nobodies?

Abby nods.

Sure. Fewer than you think. But there are. Right place, right time, right look, one tiny break, followed by another, and then another. But it still can all come crashing down. What isn't talked about is you have to have the DNA, the hardwiring, to survive the lifestyle once you start making progress.

ABBY

Meaning you can't be an agoraphobic travel writer.

PETER

Exactly. I was born with a thick skin. My mom said once, when I was three, I flipped off my pre-school teacher.

ABBY

Perhaps you were just-

PETER

-precocious?

ABBY

Confident. Entitled.

PETER

At *three*?

ABBY

Even three-year olds can sense when mom and dad have clout. Was Teach really going to kick out a Kennedy?

PETER

I never thought of that.

ABBY

Maybe you started getting that thick skin then. But it wasn't a thick skin. Flip off a teacher once, see it doesn't get you kicked out, you know it's safe to do it again. It wasn't a thick skin.

PETER

What was it then?

ABBY

You knew you were safe. Safe to challenge. Rich and powerful Kennedy kid flips off a teacher, it's leadership qualities. Abigail from Cedar Rapids does it-

PETER

-Parent-Teacher conference.

ABBY

Maybe.

PETER

My wife says I don't feel alive unless I'm sticking it to somebody. Anybody.

ABBY

And I'm overwhelmed with a churning stomach and flop sweat if I am.

PETER

Really?

ABBY

Oh yeah. It's gotten better but...yes.

PETER

You acted for awhile, didn't you?

Abby nods.

PETER

Me too. Why did you stop?

ABBY

Why did you?

PETER

It began to feel silly. Hundreds, hundreds of exactly the same type, carbon copies of me, all smart, college educated grown men fighting tooth and nail for one line on a deodorant commercial? I knew I was smarter than that.

ABBY

I thought the ones getting all the parts were smarter than me. That they knew something I didn't.

PETER

They didn't.

ABBY

I figured it out. Just took me longer.

PETER

Now that you do casting, that you are the other side of the table, don't you see his side a little more?

ABBY

Whose?

PETER

Fredrick's.

Abby nods slightly

There are just so many. Too many! In every field. It's not just ours, Abs. Business, law, restaurants...the Food Channel? Shit, Colleen, my wife, she loves the Food Channel and there are shows on the Food Channel to have a show on the Food Channel. Can you imagine the casting call for that? Everybody wants to be a star. Rich and famous and powerful. What sets one person apart from another? Maybe a personal recommendation?

ABBY

A connection.

The lobby door opens.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Hello?

Gregory enters.

GREGORY

Suz forgot her keys. We had to come back. We're in and out. I'm so sorry.

PETER

Actually, I think she's convinced I'm screwing with Abby's mind.

Suzannah enters with her backpack.

SUZANNAH

Pretty much.

PETER

I like you.

SUZANNAH

I thought your last movie sucked-

GREGORY

Suz!

SUZANNAH

-no way a CIA analyst surviving on *(She makes air quotes)* "pills, coffee, and rage," living in Afghanistan for ten years, and also managing to take down ISIS in her free time, still looks like a fucking super model by the end of the movie.

PETER

And here I was, worried about script notes.

SUZANNAH

Got those too.

GREGORY

Suz, just get your keys, okay? Abby, I'm so sorry.

Suzannah pulls out a six-pack out of her backpack.

PETER

Is that Blue Moon?

SUZANNAH

Yup.

PETER

I love Blue Moon.

Suzannah gives a beer to Abby.

ABBY

Suzannah...

GREGORY

Let's go, Suz!

ABBY

It's okay. Stay.

GREGORY

Really?

ABBY

Really.

Suzannah strolls over and hands one to Peter.

PETER

Yeah. Stay. Gregory, you want a-

ABBY

Gregory hates-

GREGORY

-I have wine in the office.

Gregory exits.

SUZANNAH

(Calling after him)

Gregory, you're a snob. Let's get some chairs.

Abby begins following Suzannah backstage. Suzannah stops and glares at Peter.

SUZANNAH (CONT'D)

HELP!

Peter jumps and the three go backstage and return with a few more chairs. They sit and Gregory strolls back with wine in a nice wine glass.

ABBY
(Toasting)

To old friends.

They all drink.

SUZANNAH
So did this Fredrick dude mess with your head too?

PETER
Are you a reporter?

SUZANNAH
Nope.

PETER
Are you taping, recording, going to tweet or text this following conversation to anyone?

SUZANNAH
Nope.

PETER
Are you going to hit me up for a job, recommendation, give me a script or in any way expect anything of me after we are done here tonight?

SUZANNAH
I thought about it. At the bar I thought, is Abby going to be that connection to the big, rich honcho director, get me my big break? And then I thought, Suzannah, your life isn't about these two old timers battling out their personal demons. They don't give a shit about you.

ABBY
-I do, Suz-

SUZANNAH
-Talking here, Abs. Me. My turn. Anyway, you seem like someone I could knock back a beer with, but I like Abby more. And she hires me and you're never going to hire a lighting chick

SUZANNAH (CONT'D)

from Chicago storefront theatre anyway. So, I came back for Abby. I was afraid you were going to be a prick to her and mess up her head even more and I like her head like it is. And my keys were in my backpack the whole time.

Peter looks at Gregory.

GREGORY

I'm here because Suz is a big, fat liar and I'm too gullible. I love Abby, and Suz is a wild card who I was certainly not leaving unattended. But sure, I'm going to tweet every word. Then update my webpage, location, um, site, then the My Space place, and then I'm going dancing with Samuel Radcliffe. I'm thinking tango.

SUZANNAH

Daniel Radcliffe. So?

PETER

Yes, he did mess with my head.

SUZANNAH

Awesome! I knew it! How? He wasn't a perv, was he?

ABBY

Suz! Geez! Fredrick wasn't a pervert! *(Pauses. To Peter)* Was he?

PETER

(Laughing)

No. Not a pervert. *(No longer laughing)* But he was mean. And so I was mean.

ABBY

You weren't mean. I would have remembered.

PETER

No. Later.

GREGORY

His behavior gave you the model.

PETER

Exactly. I thought it was acceptable. Necessary even. But it wasn't.

ABBY

What about that young and brash rule?

PETER

There's a whole lotta turf between brash and bastard. I did some things I'm not proud of. I treated people...poorly. For awhile. Occasionally. My professional reputation is spotty for good reason.

ABBY

I note the past tense of "treated people poorly." What changed?

PETER

My wife, Colleen. My second wife, by the way. She called me on...well, let me put it this way, *(he jabs his finger at Suzannah)*; I think you two were separated at birth.

SUZANNAH

So, you feel bad. So, you spend your evenings crying into a big bag of money.

PETER

Pretty much. *(Looking at Gregory)* You auditioned for me once, didn't you?

Gregory nods.

ABBY

Really!? Greg! If you remembered, he must have been wonderful. Gregory is a wonderful actor.

PETER

Yes. It was on videotape-

GREGORY

So, someone actually does watch those auditions?! It's not just-

PETER

-Yes. Yeah, we do.

SUZANNAH

What was it-

PETER

-the doctor who becomes the terrorist because he-

ABBY

-That part?! Oh my god. That was an amazing part!

PETER

Yeah, well it wasn't an amazing part when he auditioned. Once I rewrote it-

GREGORY

-no nobody would even be considered.

SUZANNAH

So, he didn't even have a chance?

PETER

Nope. Not once it got good.

SUZANNAH

That blows.

GREGORY

That's business.

PETER

Exactly.

SUZANNAH

Who-

ABBY

-Lawrence Fishbourne.

GREGORY

He was terrific. I was happy to have even been up for the same role he got! But, goodness, it really adds up. Between parking, lost hours at work, that audition and two callbacks cost me probably over \$200. *(To Abby)* Another reason why trust fund babies do so well. They can afford to hang in longer.

SUZANNAH

For one part you didn't get. Shit. *(To Peter)* And according to you, he wasn't ever going to get.

PETER

Yup. Sorry. But he signed on.

ABBY

I say this with all due respect and yes, he did sign on but, Peter, you're the power.

PETER

Meaning? Come on, Abby. The system is the system. I cannot, I should not reinvent the system. This is how it's done.

SUZANNAH

But you're the one renting the room.

ABBY

Yeah! You're the one behind the desk, the one in the four-thousand-dollar suit. Even just minor adjustments can have major impact. You can make sure people aren't screwed over.

PETER

And how exactly am I supposed to do that?

ABBY

I don't know. You can set a higher standard?

PETER

First, my standards are just fine. Second, over a thousand people work on one major motion picture, from casting, pre-production, to distribution, all of it. I can't babysit the world.

ABBY

Oh boy! I gotta call you on that. Didn't you partner, you produce movies a bunch of times with that fucking rapist?

SUZANNAH

Yeah!

A moment.

PETER

Yes. But everyone did. He was the biggest producer. He was it. If you wanted to work. It was woven into the fabric of the town, the business.

GREGORY

(Southern Accent, fanning himself)

"But our entire economy is built on this business model! How will we ever pick all this cotton? It's just how things are done, you silly ol' abolitionists!"

PETER

Yes. Okay. Guilty as charged. I looked away.

SUZANNAH

While the babysitter was raping the kid.

PETER

Oh, right. Okay. I get it. I'm another complicit asshole. But do you know how many sleazy sons of a bitches work in LA and New York? Do you have any idea? It's Ground Zero for ambitious sociopaths. So, yes. I partnered with shitty people. I regret some deals. I do. But if I didn't...it was just how it was done. It was the only game if you wanted to be in the game. And if I hadn't, if I didn't, I'd be sitting alone in a condo in Venice Beach, eating Hot Pockets and watching QVC. And I've never raped anybody.

ABBY

Setting the bar real high there, Pete.

PETER

And please don't act like your hands are clean.

ABBY

Excuse me?

PETER

Anyone treat you like shit along the way? Grab your ass? Make inappropriate comments?

ABBY

Of course.

PETER

Did you expose them? Go to their board of directors? Call them out? Announce to the entire theatre community that "Here is a bad man. We all must shun him because I say so."

ABBY

You're blaming me?

PETER

You're blaming me!

SUZANNAH

Well, actually, both of you-

ABBY

(Spinning on Suzannah)

What?! What the fuck? You're blaming me for sexual harassment and-

SUZANNAH

No! No! I didn't mean that. You know me, Abs. I so wouldn't do that. But it took a long time, and well, you know, all of you older guys, it just took a long time. To speak up. It took a long time. A really long time. And, yes, Abs. Yes, totally, I blame no woman for surviving it. However. Whatever it took.

ABBY

And if you did speak up, you got reamed. You do know that, right?

SUZANNAH

Yeah. I know.

ABBY

Yes. And still. Even with Me Too. Still.

SUZANNAH

Yeah.

Abby and Suzannah have a moment together and then slowly turn their gaze to Peter and Gregory.

GREGORY

Oh, gals, don't even.

ABBY

What?

GREGORY

It's a fucking big tent, Abs.

ABBY

What's a big tent?

GREGORY

Harassment. Sexual assault. *(Pauses)* Rape. Women aren't the only lucky ones under that particular big top, okay?

ABBY

God. Oh, Gregory. Oh, I'm-

Gregory holds up his hand for just a moment. Then he looks Abby in the eye.

GREGORY

I know. It's okay. I think I just need a little more wine.

He exits, glass in hand.

PETER

Shit. This world.

ABBY

Every time I think I can handle how dark it is...

PETER

Yeah.

SUZANNAH

Yeah.

ABBY

Where were we?

Gregory returns, his galls refilled.

GREGORY

(Smiling)

Peter's very high ethical standards.

PETER

Yeah. *(To Abby and Gregory)* But you guys know this. Being the boss sucks. I've never crossed that line but, yes, I've worked with some slimy people. And I've had to be a bastard sometimes. And sometimes people get screwed over. Sometimes good people get screwed. A project changes and they get screwed. Or sometimes their agenda is getting stroked or loved or praised or laid, and your agenda is to get the work done. And they get pissed or disappointed and bad mouth you all over town, forever, because you are...what, Abby?

ABBY

What?

PETER

You know what people call you behind your back.

ABBY

Oh, I'm a bitch. Don't appreciate people. Don't recognize true talent. Abby is only all about Abby. Cheap. Full of herself.

PETER

God, people around here are so nice.

SUZANNAH

People think I'm gay because I do tech and I only wear black and don't try to be pretty.

GREGORY

People think I must have voted for Obama because I'm black.

PETER

(Pauses)

Oh. Yeah, exactly Gregory. Yes, everyone has a truth far beyond-

GREGORY

-I'm just messing with you. God, I love doing that.

PETER

Nice. What I was saying was it's not my problem. It's not our problem. It's not. My job is to make top-notch, top-grossing movies and television series. That's what I do. I'm not UNICEF or the Peace Corps.

SUZANNAH

Can we get back to what started all this?

PETER

What started all this?

SUZANNAH

The old fart croaking. I did some digging and-

ABBY

God, I wish I had the internet when-

GREGORY

-goodness, me too!

ABBY

Greg, I thought you didn't like-

GREGORY

Oh, I don't know how to navigate all of it but what it has done for my community? For young gay men in small towns. It's...it lets you know that if your home isn't a home-

PETER

-somewhere-

GREGORY

-someplace, there are others like you. If we had Facebook and all that, Stonewall would have happened decades sooner.

ABBY

Young kids, hell, everyone has all this stuff at their fingertips-

PETER

-The means of production has left the hands of-

SUZANNAH

-Stop! Blah, blah, blah, get it. Heard it. My question.

PETER

Alright, what's your question?

SUZANNAH

Fredrick was old, even when you were there. So why are old guys such assholes? Really, the older guys get, the grumpier they get. More Republican. Intolerant. Disdainful of anything done after they were, what, doing their awesome shit in the fifties or whenever. It's like they walk around with this constant snob face on.

GREGORY

It's a hard thing, for men who once have had power and influence to face that-

ABBY

-their penises have shriveled up.

PETER

What?!

GREGORY

Abs!

ABBY

That's always my first thought. When some bastard, gray-haired guy launches on me on politics or starts sneering at anything that isn't on his short-list of "Acceptable politics or art," I think, "shriveled penis."

SUZANNAH

I love that.

ABBY

It so helps.

PETER

What about frustrated old women?

ABBY

The only reason they are grumpy is that they have to live with the frustrated old guys and spend their days having to prop up the jerk's ego.

GREGORY

Cynical much?

PETER

Is it worse having power and then having it slip away or never having power at all?

ABBY

Like love?

PETER

Sort of.

SUZANNAH

So, Fredrick was part of the shriveled penis posse?

ABBY

(To Peter)

SHIT! That's why you're really here. Well, not the shriveled penis thing, but all evening, it's been in the back of my mind. Why is uber-successful Peter Kennedy hanging out with me? With us? Something is slipping away.

PETER

You won't get it.

ABBY

Try me.

PETER

Okay.

Looking at Suzannah.

PETER (CONT'D)

But not you.

SUZANNAH

Try me.

PETER

Nope.

SUZANNAH

I promise-

PETER

-Nope.

ABBY

We need more beer, Suz.

SUZANNAH

What?! But-

GREGORY

And a couple of those candy bars Brad sells behind the bar too. No nuts.

SUZANNAH

You're making me leave?

ABBY

Just for this part.

SUZANNAH

This totally blows.

Abby reaches for her purse but then Peter pulls out her wallet and hands Suzannah some money.

I can be discreet, you know. Acting like I'm some sort of newbie-kid. This sucks.

She exits muttering. Loudly. Things like "This blows. I am so discreet. It's like 'cuz I'm not eight million years old I don't understand things. Jesus." The lobby door slams shut.

PETER

God, I like her.

ABBY

She's a sweetie.

PETER

She's us. Well, what we were. So smart. So...just beginning.

GREGORY

(Handing Peter a beer)

Last one.

Abby and Gregory wait. The lights dim to a more intimate setting.

PETER

So...I spent the last two years developing a series for HBO. And they passed on it. I was so...so...well, I shrugged and said bullshit like "That's show business" but this one hurt. And it isn't as though I haven't had this happen before. It's the business. Moved right on to another project. But I was...I am...rattled. Oh, I just plowed ahead.

ABBY

That big adaptation. For Broadway.

PETER

Yes. For Broadway. But, well, it's an adaptation.

GREGORY

It's a good word. Rattled.

PETER

(Nodding)

Yes. Shook but more primal. It's popular to trash network execs. Even premium cable. But there are actually some rather smart people in the upper echelon. And the comments I got...well...

ABBY

Well?

PETER

Boiling it down, they basically said, it is the same stuff we've seen from you before. And, oh, I got indignant! This work has made multiple networks and studios hundreds of millions of

PETER (CONT'D)

dollars! Employed stacks of people! On and on. But, at that talk yesterday, I realized, after you left, Abby, that all my excuses were...just dirt in my balloon. They were right. I am rehashing me. There is a chance my best work is behind me. I just might have run out of story.

ABBY

And the beast must still be fed.

PETER

Shit, I'm scared I'm...empty. And all these young guys, these...Suzannahs aren't They're so hungry. Prolific. Finger on the pulse. Full of opinions and ideas and passion -

ABBY

-And they're nipping at your heels.

PETER

I'm used to competition. But they are what I was and somehow, I can't compete with myself anymore. Because what am I if I'm not this?

GREGORY

Your accomplishments are extraordinary.

PETER

I know, I know, I know. But, at this HBO meeting, I was... you don't know when you've made it. You don't. In retrospect, you see those pivotal meetings, choices, fragments that changed everything but that is only looking back. Is this the moment, that event, that is the tipping point for when it all begins to slip away? Am I becoming...Fredrick? By the way, Abs, Colleen saw what you saw, Abby. I was going on one night, complaining about never scoring a Tony, talking about Fredrick and she said, "He got a Tony. He did. But then he traded in the artistic momentum for a staff, full benefits, adoring minions, and a nice retirement package."

GREGORY

Goodness, you two. Stop! He was just a guy! Sounds like a slightly pompous fella, pretty good at theatre, with lousy social skills. The emperor has clothes, they're just an off-the-rack suit and a JC Penney dress shirt like the rest of us.

PETER

Which makes him no emperor.

ABBY

Oh my god. Are we Fredrick? Are we The Man? Am I?

The lobby door is heard banging open and Suzannah comes storming in, with a six pack and a paper bag. She is breathless.

SUZANNAH

So?!

ABBY

So?

GREGORY

Did you get me a candy bar? With no nuts. I can't have-

SUZANNAH

-Greg, you tell me every single fucking time about the fucking nuts. I know. So, are you all done talking about stuff I'm too young and fragile to handle? Huh?

ABBY

Yes. Don't be a cranky.

PETER

So, Abs. What about you?

ABBY

What about me?

PETER

What's your identity...artistic...Fredrick-triggered crisis?

ABBY

My midlife crisis crazy-ass-breakdown-so-I-stalk-you thing?

SUZANNAH

Do I have to leave for this part too? 'Cuz I'm not going to.

Abby, Peter, and Gregory ignore her.

GREGORY

Your menopausal meltdown?

PETER

Existential drift?

ABBY & GREGORY

(Singing in unison, Peter joining in for "Alfie?")

"What's it all about, Alfie?"

Abby crosses to grab a beer.

ABBY

I think...no one wants to think they're ordinary. Am I a half-assed artist? Am I a half-assed person, short the one bit of flair that moves me into being touched by God? If I just had done one thing better, turned a different corner, kicked down a door somewhere along the line, would my work, would I, matter?

She opens the beer and takes a swig.

That's what an award is, you know. A group of people, and we ARE defined by each other, no matter what anybody else says, fuck Buddha, saying, "Yes, you matter. Your truth is our truth. You got it." Awards, promotions, money, interviews, praise, all of it. It means your viewpoint, your existence, your work, labor, sweat and involvement are of value. And that sounds so fucked up and needy and awful, but isn't it a little bit true too? I think I fear that my art has no meaning. Really. That's it. That my art...no...that I have no meaning. That after all my plans, dreams, work, I made the wrong choices so I'm not even a...dent in the car crash of life!

GREGORY

Well, now we know why you aren't writing plays.

ABBY

Stop. I know, it's a shitty metaphor. But maybe this is an existential crisis. Have I done enough? Is doing this all enough? Did I waste my allotment of talent, gifts, and...and...opportunity? Was Fredrick right?

PETER

I don't think so.

SUZANNAH

I know he wasn't. Look at all you've done.

GREGORY

Shit, I really, really hope not.

ABBY

Because you've thrown your artistic lot in with a flyer-over failure such as myself?

GREGORY

Because it means I might have really screwed some people over.

ABBY

What?

PETER

Elaborate.

SUZANNAH

Greg, you're pretty bad ass for an old fart-

GREGORY

-Stop. I know. I'm fabulous. But you forget. I also taught for a couple of decades before working my way up here to nirvana.

ABBY

I did forget.

SUZANNAH

Never knew.

PETER

College?

GREGORY

Oh no! High school. History, social studies.

SUZANNAH

You do have sort of a teacher vibe going on.

GREGORY

But, listening to you both talk about this Fredrick. You both had such different experiences. And, well, teachers are human. I have been looking back and, well, there are special students. There are! Ones you have more a connection with. It's like anything. Like, Abby, you keep casting Christina. There are stacks of fabulous actresses but you two click. You and Fredrick didn't. *(To Peter)* You and Fredrick did. I think he was more to you than what you've said tonight.

Peter nods.

You're being nice. Nice to Abby. But for whatever reason, there was an additional connection. And there were probably other teachers that cheered you on, right Abby?

Abby nods.

SUZANNAH

But he was the head guy.

GREGORY

Yes, certainly. And it sounds like he could have navigated it more...gracefully. But we're human. All of us. I know I was. Jocelyn Cooper. She was brilliant. So engaged. She's teaching anthropology at Dartmouth. One of my students! Sean Parks. He wrote papers with this wit, this insightfulness, connecting history with pop culture. Incredible. Funny, smart, wonderful students. But there was also this kid, Richie. Dumb as a stump in my class. Honestly, I couldn't look at him. He had this perpetual empty, blank stare. Like a linebacker in a...rose garden. But Zack, the Applied Arts teacher? LOVED Richie. Said Richie could make anything three-dimensional, wood, metal, electronic, work, almost "sing" according to Zack. I suppose we can't be everything to everyone.

PETER

(Looking around the theatre)

Are we, all of us, are we having fun? Do you three have fun? Doing this?

ABBY

I worry a lot about money. My feelings get hurt more than I really want to admit. I worry that I'm not enough. But, yes, when that all falls away, fun is there. God, I love making theatre.

Peter looks at Suzannah.

SUZANNAH

When people aren't kicking me out or not getting me the dimmer pack, I totally, absolutely need, Abby, yes, I'm having a hoot.

Peter looks at Gregory.

GREGORY

Goodness, Peter, you are a wonderful fella, more than I even would have given you credit for even a few hours ago, and I get what you are going for but "fun"? Really? Fun is a rich man's luxury. I have it, I see Abby and Suz and all of us having it, but first is survival, second is figuring out how to be an authentic person in the deeply, horribly flawed and violent world. After that comes about fifty or sixty more hoops to make it through.

PETER

You're probably right.

Peter takes a big swig of beer.

PETER (CONT'D)

Do you resent me for being rich, white, successful and having every-

GREGORY

-God, YES! Absolutely. Yes. Of course! Really? You have to ask?

PETER

White privilege. Look, I get it. I know-

ABBY

-Peter, it's just that-

GREGORY

-Abs, really? I think this is mine.

ABBY

Sorry. Yeah. Sorry.

GREGORY

(To Peter)

Of course, I resent you. I like you as well. Luckily, humans have evolved enough to embrace multiple emotions and thoughts at the same time. But that's what burns. If a black man does something crappy, whoa! Stop the presses. Race war. A white guy does something crappy, well, suddenly y'all embrace nuance, reason, and complexity. And I love your work but why is there always only one black man playing the honorable, pivotal, but always secondary character? It's never three black guys unless it's a "race" episode. If it's two black guys, and that's a big if, one has to be old and one has to be young. Or why not two Latinas and one fat Asian woman? And...and you and the other show runners, and all the rich, white, Fortune 500, Amazon, Steve Gates, I mean Jobs, Apple, private school, bankers and hedge fund and Silicon Valley, tech rich, whatever, whoever, you all are all so goddamn rich and so many people are not rich. At all. And all these people, these people, who are your people, Peter, they decimate the economy and pour poison into water, and market poison, and arm and destroy and they end up with their names on museums and on boards and in presidential cabinets and my nephew is serving five years for possession with intent and Danny's niece can't afford her insulin and it is so fucking unfair it shakes my soul every day and I can't even allow myself to be frustrated with young people like an old timer like me should normally be but I can't be. Because I have to stick up for all young black men all the time and I understand their horrible circumstance but sometimes I just want to be Gregory. Just me. Not a representative of black men or gay men or my people but just Cabernet-preferring-peanut-allergy Gregory who loves to act, read historical fiction, and watches *Buffy* reruns when he's stressed out. It's all just really rather exhausting. Constantly. Always. Exhausting.

Everyone takes a long swig of their drink.

GREGORY (CONT'D)

Goodness, that felt quite good. But, back to your original question. Yes, I am having fun.

SUZANNAH

Wow. Been holding that in for a while, Greg?

GREGORY

Well, yes. I think I probably have been. *(To Peter)* And no, you cannot put all that in a script. Unless I get the part, that is.

PETER

Deal.

A long moment.

So, Suzannah, what is your take on all of this? I suspect your wry and witty aside are covering some rather nuanced thoughts on all of this.

SUZANNAH

“Nuanced”? “Wry and witty”? No wonder you do so good in Hollywoodland.

PETER

You’re an ambitious theatre artist. Why are you here?

SUZANNAH

Okay. I’ll share. Even though you completely shut me out on your sharing. Guess I’m just more mature than you all.

GREGORY

Clearly.

ABBY

Absolutely.

PETER

Jury’s still out.

SUZANNAH

Fuck you. Okay. I looked at the hand I was dealt and what I really, really wanted to do. If I did go to New York or London, was I really going to get to light the shit I get to light here? Some random girl from Racine? Oh yeah. I’m sure the union would have welcomed me with open

SUZANNAH (CONT'D)

arms. Nope. I can do what I want, right now. Abby, I also think, even though you were totally right, and ass-hat Fredrick was...an ass-hat, maybe...maybe you weren't the bomb in college. You are the wildly awesome bomb now but maybe then; you were just another face. And he was a tired, old sort-of-success who didn't have time for every needy actor panting at his feet.

PETER

(Glancing at Abby)

She's getting it.

ABBY

Yup.

SUZANNAH

I'm getting what?

ABBY

You're becoming The Man.

SUZANNAH

I am so not becoming The Man.

ABBY

(Shrugging)

Okay.

SUZANNAH

Am I?

PETER

Somebody has to.

GREGORY

Does somebody have to? Does somebody have to be The Man?

SUZANNAH

But me The Man? I don't want to be the bad guy.

PETER

Shit, stop it. "Bad guy." "Bitch." Whatever. It's bullshit. Someone has to run things. Make things. DO! And wouldn't any of you, all of you, have seized my advantages if you had them?

GREGORY

It's not that-

ABBY

-It's the reverse. Peter, if you were in my skin, Cedar Rapids, female, middle class skin, would you be "you" today? Or in Gregory's body? Born black, Baptist, gay, in southern Indiana instead of Connecticut?

PETER

Does it matter?

ABBY

YES! It does.

PETER

To you.

ABBY

Yes, to me.

PETER

As much as you want me to say, you're right, I'm here because of being white, rich, and from the East Coast, I'm not going to. I have worked my fucking ass off. I've sacrificed friendships, my first marriage, been told *no* and *fuck you* and a hundred things worse more times than I can count but I still kept going. And if any of you were me, and born with what I was born with, you would have done the exact same thing. Taken advantage of every bit of advantage. Because that's what humans do. That's who we are.

ABBY

And that's what every privileged white guy says.

PETER

And that includes you, pretty white lady. Don't blame your failures on me.

A long moment.

SUZANNAH

Okay, you two. Break it up.

Abby and Peter step back and both take a swig of their beer.

Thanks for the second round, fella. If you really want to calm her down (*gesturing to Abby*) you could donate a dimmer pack or two, rich guy.

PETER

I asked if you were going to ask me for anything. You said *no*, young lady.

SUZANNAH

Lying to you has devastated me.

ABBY

(To Peter)

Okay, Peter. You're right. You're right! Every day, every moment, since Fredrick died and I read all those fucking tributes, I've been wondering if this was enough, if this was it. All I do. The best I ever got.

Why does God make people like me? Only satisfied doing something no one gives a shit that you're doing unless you're the one-in-a-million who wins the crap shoot and then everybody is passionately in love with everything you touch. And I don't just mean you (*gesturing to Peter*) but all of you. But if you're not that guy, you're one of the thousands with your nose forever pressed against the professional window. Doing our work in the cracks. Hours seized from other places.

By the way, I think you're wrong. The business isn't the beast. I am. I keep lurching forward, like a goddam hog looking for truffles, just digging for the opportunity to do this stupid thing that my particular genetic make-up and cultural brainwashing made me want. The only time I'm content, really just totally completely-out-of-my-skin-but-in-my-skin Abby is in those tiny, tiny moments when it all comes together in a rehearsal. Or there is a single divine performance, everyone is just note perfect, and the entire audience, all thirty-six of them, are swept up in the story. But so few ever see it. So, will those moments have been enough for me when I die? Because if I'm being honest, I can only count maybe, eight or ten of them.

PETER

Is it enough?

ABBY

(A moment)

No. Not even close. *(She thinks for a long moment)* But-

GREGORY

-Oh, thank god there's a "but"! Abs, you were really beginning to depress the shit outta me.

SUZANNAH

Me too. That was getting way dark.

ABBY

Hey! Toughen up. We're all being honest. Right?

She looks at Peter. He holds her gaze for a moment.

ABBY (CONT'D)

Look. I'm-

PETER

-Don't apologize. Don't. It's okay. We're okay.

ABBY

Okay.

PETER

You okay, Abs?

She's not.

ABBY

Working on it.

Gregory holds up his phone.

GREGORY

Well, I hate to depart this invigorating gathering but Danny is requesting my appearance.

ABBY

It's probably time. *(To Gregory)* I'll check the bathrooms. That toilet -

GREGORY

I'll get the back-

They exit. Suzannah begins cleaning up the beer bottles and candy wrappers. After a brief glare at Peter, he begins to help.

PETER

I know how Abby became Abby, I have a bead on Gregory but you. How-

SUZANNAH

-How did I evolve into this fabulous truth-teller, with my fetching devil-may-care je ne-say quoi?

PETER

Yup.

SUZANNAH

Put those chairs upstage. My dad, probably. He was sort of like Gregory. But straight. Short. Fat. White. Only wore sweatshirts. But he had this "Really?" thing going on.

PETER

Really?

SUZANNAH

Really.

PETER

No. I meant-

SUZANNAH

Just fucking with you. No. He would watch TV. Or listen to me talk about something. And he would say "Really?" really calmly. And I would go, "Really." And he would go "REALLY? You really think-" whatever. Did I really think something was right. Or wrong. Or stupid. He had this way of dissecting people's bullshit with just a few words. Even when he was in...when he was...

Suzannah stops.

When he...we would watch *Star Trek* and *Battlestar* and *Deep Space Nine*. And the news. CNN. Fox. Maddow. BBC. All of it. And he kept asking me what I really thought. What I really felt. He said...he couldn't give me money, but he could give me my gut. Trust in my gut.

PETER

How did he-

SUZANNAH

Stomach cancer. He said "My gut is getting eaten up, Suzy. The least I can do is to get you to trust yours." So now, every time I start bullshitting-

PETER

-you think of him.

SUZANNAH

And I can't. I can't do it.

PETER

Wow. That is...the most amazing legacy.

SUZANNAH

That's my dad. That was my dad.

Abby and Gregory return. Peter has stopped and is staring at the stage floor.

ABBY

You okay?

PETER

This is how I felt.

ABBY

How you felt when?

PETER

When Fredrick died. I felt like something was over, but it wasn't complete. Like I was on an empty stage after a show, but I was unsatisfied with the ending. But I didn't know how I wanted it to end; just what had happened wasn't enough.

ABBY

Tonight wasn't enough?

PETER

I think you got an answer-

ABBY

Maybe. But you didn't.

Peter nods.

GREGORY

What was your question?

PETER

That's the problem. I know I have one but I'm coming up empty on what exactly it is.

ABBY

You'll get it, Peter. And thanks.

PETER

For what?

ABBY

This. Coming here. And caring about...

She stops. He waits.

For being what we're all supposed to aspire to but still being really fucked up.

PETER

(Smiling)

Glad to help.

END SCENE ONE

SCENE TWO

Abby is hanging suits neatly on hangers and draping them in a pile across the desk. There is a stack of papers and a script on the chair behind her. Her purse is also on the chair. Gregory enters with a small box of items from his dressing room.

ABBY

Do you want Danny's suits back?

GREGORY

Goodness, no.

ABBY

He did ask me about the glen plaid one.

GREGORY

Please, I'm begging you. It'll just make him try to fit into it again and he's a bitch when he's dieting.

ABBY

(Glancing in his box)

Hey. That's my travel mug.

GREGORY

I thought.

He pulls it out and hands it to her.

It was a good run.

Abby nods.

The Jeff recommendation was nice.

ABBY

Yeah. It was. I think it was for the riveting performance by the male lead.

GREGORY

Nah. He was way over the top. I think it's for the sublime direction.

ABBY

Maybe both?

GREGORY

No, Abby. It really was amazing. Your work on this. After, well, you know-

ABBY

-Peter.

GREGORY

Yes. You pushed us all into something better. Artistically, it was-

ABBY

-Hard? Too much? Oh god-

GREGORY

-No! Don't do that. It was good. It was really good. It was important.

ABBY

It was. It felt good to be scared again. You know? Fired up. Raw. A little angry. Just unsettled and crazy. Good crazy but...uncertain but doing it anyway. I felt...brave. I felt brave.

The stage is flooded with light. Both Abby and Gregory react, either with a moan or eye roll.

(Calling) Suz! Stop-

GREGORY

Really. Enough.

SUZANNAH

(Calling from the stage manager's booth)

It's just so fucking pretty.

Lights resume to the previous setting.

ABBY

(Muttering to Gregory)

The Jeff rec is probably for lighting. I've never had so many fucking light cues in a single production.

Suzannah enters.

SUZANNAH

What the hell are you two still doing here anyway? We're done. Run's over. An actor might just actually buy us a drink if we run real fast to the bar.

GREGORY

Danny already texted. He bought the first round.

SUZANNAH

Just so you know, from now on, a brightly lit stage will be The Kennedy cue.

ABBY

While grateful for Peter's donation of the multiple dimmer packs, perhaps next show we can aim for under two-hundred-and-fifty light cues? Please?!

SUZANNAH

Hell no! Use it or lose it. So, you're staying?

ABBY

Oh, I'm getting drunk. Just gotta-

SUZANNAH

-No. Here. Doing this.

ABBY

What? Yes! Of course.

GREGORY

Don't with that surprised act. She has cause. You've been different the past few weeks.

SUZANNAH

Yeah. And it's been freaking me out. Stop it. Be normal.

ABBY

Well, excuse me. I was cleaning up after my existential crisis. I'm allowed. It's my theatre.

GREGORY

I'm planning an existential crisis for Thursday. Any tips?

Abby resumes very slowly and precisely hanging the suits.

ABBY

Peter said this thing, I don't think you were there, but he said, "It's not about you, it's not personal, and go big or go home." It's been ringing in my brain. What I got is.... for me, for whatever reason, this, it, making this shit, it is personal. For me. I can't not be Abby in it all. With all my mess. And, go big or go home? I think I didn't want to sacrifice the home part too, for going big. *(Pauses)* I couldn't. I couldn't not be me. I am a result of all that came before me. And I bring all that mess, all my mess, right along with me, and that's alright too. The big,

ABBY (CONT'D)

fancy, take-no-prisoner's fame way is good, and my way is good. Not cover of TIME good, not living wage or Tony award good, but still pretty good. *(To Gregory)* How's that?

GREGORY

Fabulous. I might even bump my breakdown to next month.

SUZANNAH

Cool. Color me relieved. Now, let's go drink.

ABBY

Wait. I want to run something by you both first. Before the bar. See if I'm crazy.

GREGORY

Okay.

ABBY

I'm going to get him to write us a play.

SUZANNAH

Who?

ABBY

Peter Kennedy.

SUZANNAH

Oh please. There's no way.

ABBY

Yeah. I know! But I think I will. I'm gonna call his bluff, Mr. It's-Impossible-To-Know. I'll make him prove his point. I'll tell him he has to use a pen name. And a fake bio. He has to have the bio of some unknown playwright. See if his work gets any traction based on only the work. No privilege. No connections. No wealth. No agent. Just the art. That even without all his extra privilege stuff, he still would have made it.

GREGORY

That's rather brilliant. And a tiny bit evil.

SUZANNAH

You're such a bad ass.

ABBY

I am. I am a bad ass. I'll tell him in his bio he has to be a woman too. Oh! Oh!! A middle-aged woman! A middle-aged, Midwestern, suburban.... mother of two who drives a fucking minivan!

SUZANNAH

Oh, that would just be cruel. No one could overcome that. Even though it's awesome.

GREGORY

Truly.

ABBY

Okay, okay. A Midwestern middle-aged woman with a couple of minor productions and lots of readings. But that's it.

SUZANNAH

Ya know, he might do it.

GREGORY

But he's blocked. Oh, shit.

ABBY

Gregory! He didn't want-

SUZANNAH

-Oh my god! Is that what his big ass secret was? He's got fucking writer's block?! How lame. I thought it was cancer or his dick actually was falling off. Writers are so much more dramatic than actors. Jesus.

ABBY

And I have a prompt.

GREGORY

Aren't you the bossy little minx?

ABBY

I am. I'm going to suggest...recommend he write about us. And him. You know. Theatre and power and success and idea-y stuff. Wordy, high concept stuff. He'll totally bite.

GREGORY

It is a good prompt. And very castable.

SUZANNAH

It would be good. Although if he makes my character a guy, I'll rip his nuts off.

GREGORY

Alright, Abby. Let me be devil's advocate here.

ABBY

As is your wont.

GREGORY

What if he does it. What if he writes it, we produce it, and it's a hit? A huge, massive hit? Proving his success is not anything to do with any advantage.

ABBY

That Fredrick was right? It's a risk. Yeah. But fuck Fredrick. It would make a good show. I'm not going to let some dead old man define me. Fuck 'em all. Let's make some killer art.

SUZANNAH

Sweet. So, let's go! Oh, can I borrow one of these?

She grabs a suit jacket from the pile.

It's freezing out.

ABBY

Sure.

ABBY AND GREGORY

(Quickly, in unison)

Not the plaid!

Suzannah jumps a little but then pulls out another jacket and slips it on.

SUZANNAH

Okay then.

GREGORY

You look fabulous. Very Diane Keaton-

ABBY

-Yes! Annie-

SUZANNAH

-*Russian Doll*-

ABBY

-*Hall*. What? *Russian Doll*?-

SUZANNAH

Natasha Lyonne. In *Russian Doll*. You haven't? Oh god! And, yes, I've seen-

ABBY

You've seen *Annie Hall*? 'Cuz-

SUZANNAH

-YES! Have you seen-

GREGORY

-Stop. (*To Abby*) It's on Netflix.

ABBY

There's too much! Too much to watch. Go. I'll lock behind you.

SUZANNAH

Abs.

ABBY

Order me a gin and tonic. Two limes.

SUZANNAH

Yeah, yeah. Abs?

ABBY

Yeah?

SUZANNAH

You know that new play reading series thingy?

ABBY

Yes, I know.

SUZANNAH

I was thinking that I'd maybe...sort of maybe want to try directing one of them.

ABBY

Okay.

SUZANNAH

I mean, I've been watch you and Paul and Freddy and Johnny-Dickface-Cowboys-Fan-Shithead Simmons for awhile and I just thought, well, maybe I could, I'd like to try so I was wondering.

ABBY

Yes.

SUZANNAH

You can say no. I mean-

ABBY

-Yes.

SUZANNAH

Really?

ABBY

Yes. Of course. Yes. Are you kidding?

SUZANNAH

Cool. Okay. Wow. Okay. Thanks. I'm going to direct something. Okay.

She sees Gregory leaning in the doorway and grinning.

SUZANNAH

What are you being so "Gregory" about?

GREGORY

I didn't say anything!

SUZANNAH

No one can be that smug-

They begin exiting together as they bicker.

GREGORY

-Oh! "Smug." The child's using a fancy word!-

SUZANNAH

-and publicly admit to watching *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*.

GREGORY

You're such a reverse snob.

Gregory and Suzannah are gone. Abby stacks her script and other papers, slides them neatly into her purse, clicks the purse closed, and puts the strap across her body so it rests comfortably on her hip. She takes her keys and clips them onto a hook on her purse. With one hand she then picks up the suits from their hanger hooks, with the other hand she picks up her travel mug. She glances briefly around the theatre to insure everything is in order, and then exits.

END OF PLAY